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(71) Applicant:
UNIVERSAL ELECTRONICS, INC.
Cypress, California 90630-4841 (US)

(72) Inventors:
• **Johns, Gregory L.**
Carlsbad, California 92008 (US)
• **Conway, James N. Jr.**
Corona del Mar, California 92625 (US)
• **Hayes, Patrick H.**
Mission Viejo, California 92691 (US)

(74) Representative:
Rees, David Christopher
Kilburn & Strode
20 Red Lion Street
London WC1R 4PJ (GB)

(54) **Universal remote control system with device activated setup**

(57) A universal remote control system with device activated set up wherein the device to be controlled such as a TV, VCR or other consumer electronic product, and the associated remote control unit are pre-programmed and adapted to automatically reconfigure the remote control unit to communicate with a device to be controlled as soon as said device is connected to its power source.

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Description

[0001] This invention relates generally to infrared remote control systems and, more particularly, to universal remote control units wherein one remote control unit can control a number of various types of devices such as televisions, video cassette recorders (VCRs), cable boxes, disk players and other electronic equipment. The invention provides an improvement to such universal remote control systems for enabling the devices and remote control unit to be ready to communicate with each other, and to enable commands to be sent from the remote control unit to a device substantially as soon as the unit is connected to a power source.

[0002] Most manufacturers provide remote controls to control their equipment, and equipment of different manufacturers are often controlled with different remote control units. To minimize the number of individual remote control units a user requires, universal remote control units have been developed. Accordingly, infrared remote control units for controlling various functions of television receivers, VCR's, and auxiliary electronic equipment have become quite widespread in recent years. U.S. Patent No. 5,255,313 issued to Darbee and assigned to Universal Electronics Inc., and U.S. Patent No. 5,552,917 issued to Darbee et al and assigned to Universal Electronics Inc. disclose universal remote control systems.

[0003] In a common method of setting up and using a universal remote control unit, infrared ("IR") function codes that are to be learned and used are made available from the device to be controlled. The consumer or user is required to program or adapt the universal remote control unit to control the user's particular equipment, such as television sets, VCRs, entertainment media, and other devices. Alternatively, codes can be preprogrammed into the remote control to communicate with the equipment to be controlled. In either case, the programming and adaption of the universal remote control to the user's particular equipment can be demanding, exacting and generally frustrating for many users.

[0004] This invention provides a universal control system wherein the equipment to be controlled and the associated remote control unit are preprogrammed and adapted to automatically configure or reconfigure the remote control unit to communicate with the equipment to be controlled as soon as the equipment is connected to a power source, in other words, the equipment to be controlled activates the setup of the remote control.

[0005] The foregoing features and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following more particular description of the invention. The accompanying drawings, listed hereinbelow, are useful in explaining the invention.

Fig. 1 is a plan view of an inventive universal remote control unit with device activated setup capability;
Fig. 2 is a sketch showing the inventive system wherein a remote control unit provides controls to a TV set and VCR;

Fig. 3 is a flow chart of the initial power application process of the inventive system;

Fig. 4 is a flow chart of the preprogrammed system set-up logic of the inventive system;

Fig. 5 is a sketch showing the data frame layout of the inventive system;

Fig. 6 is a sketch showing the bit pattern of the data stream of the inventive system; and

Fig. 7 is a sketch illustrating the frame format, the bit format and the subcarrier format of the burst-type modulation used in the present invention.

[0006] The present invention relates to a universal remote control system with device activated setup capability. As stated above, universal remote control units are prevalent in the market place. Each of these remote control units are used to control various types and brands of electronic devices (equipment) in the consumer's or user's home such as the TV, the VCR, cable box, disk player, etc. However, the prior art universal remote control systems have to be programmed or adapted by the user to control his particular equipment. Often this programming and adaptation becomes quite difficult and frustrating to the user. As stated above, the present invention is directed to providing a system wherein the devices to be controlled and the remote control unit are ready to enter into communication with each other as soon as the device is plugged into a power source, and without requiring the user to program or code in a set of commands: that is, the remote control unit can be setup with minimal intervention and involvement of the user.

[0007] Fig. 1 depicts the inventive system 11 wherein a universal remote control unit with device activated setup (hereinafter "universal remote control unit with DAS") capability 12 is positioned to control a TV set 14 and a VCR 15. Fig. 2 shows the universal remote control device with DAS 12 in more detail. The remote control 12 includes a micro-controller 19, an IR transmitter and an IR receiver, generally labeled as 20, various command keys generally labeled 16, and the power key or button 17, all as is well known.

[0008] A consumer or user will purchase a new universal ready VCR 15 in accordance with the invention to replace his old VCR of any known brand. The inventive universal system instructions will direct the user to: a) plug the new VCR 15 into a power source. b) hold the universal remote control unit with DAS 12 close to VCR 15, and c) press the power button to turn the VCR 15 on. When this is done, VCR 15 "powers on" and the universal remote control unit with DAS 12 which previously controlled the old VCR now controls new VCR 15. A VCR is being referred to herein for purposes

of explanation, however, it is to be understood that the invention relates to and is useful with a variety of other electronic devices or equipment as referred to above.

[0009] There are other ways to get into the identify mode or state. For instance, if the user owns equipment before he acquires a universal remote control unit with DAS, additional means to get the equipment to communicate or squawk are necessary. In this regard, the TV or other electronic device can be equipped with a menu which provides a means for initiating the squawk mode. Additionally, the squawk mode can be accessed by having the user hold down a combination of buttons on the front panel of the device. Additionally, it is possible to simulate the plugging in of the electronic device by having some type of master reset button that can be accessed on the device.

[0010] Fig. 3 is a flow chart of the software program for the initial power application process for VCR 15. Briefly referring to Fig. 3, when AC power is applied, VCR 15 emits an identity squawk signal and then "turns on" its IR receiver and monitors for a command. If VCR 15 receives a "power on" signal, it performs a "power on" function and proceeds to normal operation. If VCR 15 does not receive a "power on" IR signal, the program checks it to see if power has been "turned on" from its front panel; if it has, VCR 15 performs the "power on" function and proceeds to normal operation. If VCR 15 has not been "powered on" by its front panel button, the squawk process is repeated.

[0011] To explain in more detail, the programmed operating logic of the system 11 is such that when the new VCR 15 detects that it has been plugged in but has not yet received a "power on" signal from the remote control unit 12, the VCR enters an initialization state and transmits an IR data signal, comprising an identification or "squawk" signal which identifies:

- a) the type of device it is, and
- b) the remote control encoding format to which it responds.

After sending out its squawk signal, VCR 15 listens for a period of time for a "power on" command in its specified format.

[0012] Referring now to Fig. 4 which is a flow chart of the software program for the set-up logic for the remote control unit 12. If the user simply presses any key 16, other than the power button 17, on the remote control unit 12, this wakes-up or energizes the microcontroller 19 in the remote control unit 12 and causes it to send the appropriate IR signal in the usual manner. In the case wherein the power button 17 of remote control unit 12 is actuated, the microcontroller 19 first briefly places itself in the receive mode and listens for a squawk signal. If no squawk is detected, remote control unit 12 proceeds to send the power function in the normal manner, and since the "power on" operation generally takes a few seconds, the brief (millisecond) delay caused by the listening time period is not noticeable to the user.

[0013] If the microcontroller 19 of remote control unit 12 detects a recognizable squawk during this pre-power listening period, it proceeds to analyze the identification data. If the VCR 15 type and requested IR format are supported by the remote control unit 12, the microcontroller 19 commences executing the sequence of instructions needed to send an appropriate IR code in response to the squawk signal from the VCR. Thus, the remote control unit 12 reconfigures its programming to the VCR 15 and then transmits the power command in the new format. If the device or equipment is not supported by the remote control unit 12, the remote control simply remains unchanged in its previous configuration. If no "power on" command is received, VCR 15 repeats its identification "squawk" and listens again, continuing this alternating squawk/listen sequence until such time as a response is received. As soon as a valid "power on" command is received, VCR 15 exits this initialization state and commences normal operation.

[0014] In standard universal remote controls, the user selects a transmission format by looking up a designation number for his device in a code list supplied with the remote control, and enters that designation number into the remote control. As becomes clear from the foregoing explanation, a principal object of the identification squawk of the inventive system is to allow the device to automatically supply this designation number to the remote control unit. Once the designation number has been supplied to the remote control unit, the programming and mechanisms involved in this set-up process are well known in the art and need not be described in detail herein.

[0015] If the user presses the power button on the front panel of the VCR, this will also cause the VCR to exit the squawking state. That makes provision for a user who does not wish to use a remote control unit. Using a single function remote control unit will also cause the VCR to exist the "squawk" state, thus providing a control means for the user who does not use a universal remote control.

[0016] Fig. 5 shows the data frame layout. The data content of the squawk signal is a 32 bit value, utilized as shown in the following table:

5	8 bits	System identification to allow possible future multiple versions of the system to co-exist without interfering with one another's settings.			
10	4 bits	Device category			
15		00	TV	08	CD player
		01	VCR	09	Amplifier
20		02	Cassette tape	10	Tuner
		03	Laser disk	11	Home automation
25		04	Digital audio tape	12	Misc. audio
		05	Cable box	13	Phonograph
30		06	Satellite IRD	14	DVD
		07	Video Accessory	15	Spare
35	12 bits	Device designation number, set-up code in the pre-programmed library.			
40	8 bits	check byte (longitudinal parity of the preceding three bytes)			

[0017] The data is transmitted, most significant bit first, using a burst duration modulation scheme as follows:

45	Encoding:	Burst duration modulation using amplitude shift keyed IR subcarrier.
	Subcarrier:	40 KHz
50	Bit encoding:	Basic time interval is $t = 500 \mu s$ (20 cycles of subcarrier. Burst times (nominal) are t and $2t$. Gap times (nominal) are t and $2t$.
55	Frame format:	Bits per frame: 32 Preamble burst: 4.0mS (8t) Preamble gap: 4.0mS (8t)
	Interframe gap:	150 MS minimum

[0018] The encoded data stream consists of alternating intervals of carrier and no carrier. The duration of each inter-

val signals the value of the bit corresponding to that location. Ones are represented by short intervals, zeros are represented by long intervals. An example of the bit pattern for "1101001" is encoded as shown in Fig. 5. The data frame layout is shown in Fig. 7. Each data frame is preceded by a preamble (pre) burst which consists of a 4.0 mS of constant carrier, followed by a 4.0 mS gap; which is followed in turn by a inter-frame gap of 150mS during which time the transmitting unit monitors its receiver for a "power on" command in the format requested by the squawk it has just transmitted. Note that the VCR (or other device to be controlled by the remote control unit) can provide squawks alternating between a number of different device numbers if it is capable of supporting multiple formats.

[0019] This encoding format is one implementation but other encoding schemes can be used to achieve the same result. As described above, the device to be controlled (VCR 15 in this case) begins by transmitting its squawk in the format described above. As is shown in Fig. 7, in the bit encoding scheme used, the minimum frame time (including the preamble burst) is 24.5mS, while the maximum frame time is 40.5mS. The exact time is dependent on the particular mixture of ones and zeros being sent. After sending a squawk, the device then enables its IR receiver and monitors for a "power on" command. If no command is detected after 150mS of monitoring, the device continues to repeat this pattern. Since the majority of remote control transmission formats use a frame repetition rate equal to or less than 120mS, the 150mS monitoring time is adequate to allow a standard (non-universal) remote control shipped with the system to initiate a power on command and cause the device to exit the initial state, in the event the user does not have a universal remote control unit.

[0020] If however, the user is introducing a universal remote control unit to the system, he holds it near to the device to be controlled and presses the "power" key. When the remote control detects that the power key has been pressed, it first enables its IR receiver for approximately 600mS and monitors for a valid squawk. Since the squawk is repeated at least once every 190mS, there will be at least three opportunities to decode a valid squawk during this time interval. The methods for receiving decoding such an IR data stream are well known.

[0021] If no squawk is detected, or if a squawk is detected but specifies a device (equipment) type or number not supported by this remote control, the remote control simply sends the "power" command in the normal manner and in the format currently in use. As mentioned above, the short delay introduced by the initial monitoring interval will generally not be noticed by the user, since the power on function is usually slower than most other commands. However, if a valid squawk is detected, the remote control responds by sending a "power" command in the requested format, commencing during the 150mS inter-frame interval. Some devices may require multiple repeats of an IR command code before responding, however it is sufficient to start sending the command during the inter-frame gap. Once the device to be controlled detects that it is receiving a possible command, its internal logic will suspend the squawk cycle until it has made a final determination regarding the signal being received.

[0022] After sending the "power" command, the remote control unit then monitors to confirm that the squawking has ceased. If squawking has ceased, the remote control then sets itself to operate using the newly specified format for all future operation. If the squawking has not ceased, the remote control will try the sequence twice more before abandoning the attempt and exiting with current settings unchanged.

[0023] As disclosed in a co-pending U.S. Patent Application, the receiver circuit, used for the listening function in the inventive system, can use the transmit IR LED as a detector. This will reduce the cost of the circuit and enhance packaging convenience.

[0024] It is also important to note that the controlling unit may be a type of device other than a hand held remote control unit. For instance, the controlling device could be a personal computer, that is, the personal computer would receive the "squawk" and set itself to operate the particular electronic product to be controlled. In yet another embodiment, in situations where the user has an electronic device that does not include DAS, the personal computer could have the capability of performing the function of setting up the remote control unit through the use of DAS wherein the requisite information for set up is stored in the memory of the personal computer.

[0025] Infrared (IR) has been selected as the communication medium for this embodiment since unidirectional IR sending and receiving functionality is already available in remote control applications and this requires the least amount of additional hardware. However, other transmission mediums such as radio frequency ("RF"), inductive coupling, visible light (modulating a TV picture signal) would be equally suitable as a communication mediums.

Claims

1. A remote control system comprising:

- a) a universal remote control unit for controlling a plurality of electronic devices, said remote control unit having programming means which can be reconfigured in response to selected identification signals: and,
- b) a preprogrammed electronic device, said device capable of sending selected identification signals, said signals containing the information necessary for reconfiguring said remote control unit to control said device.

2. A control unit for controlling electronic devices, said unit including programming means for responding to the energization of an associated electronic device, said programming means enabling said control unit to selectively enable operating functions, features and channels of the particular controlled device.

5 3. A system as in Claim 1 wherein said programming means provides individualized features for each electronic device.

4. A system as in Claim 1 wherein said selected identification signals are communicated via infrared.

10 5. A universal remote control system with device activated setup comprising:

a) a preprogrammed electronic device, said device including programming means for providing data signals identifying the type of device and the remote control encoding format to which said device responds; and,

15 b) a remote control for receiving said data signals and configuring itself to communicate with said device and to transmit commands in the format of said device.

6. A universal ready remote control system as in Claim 5 wherein said electronic device provides a squawk signal which identifies:

20 a) the type of device it is, and

b) the remote control encoding format to which it responds.

25 7. A universal ready remote control system as in Claim 5 wherein said remote control provides a "power on" signal in response to the squawk signal received from said device and reconfigures itself to initiate and establish control of said device.

30 8. A control system for electronic apparatus comprising a control device for controlling at least one electronic device, said electronic device being preprogrammed to send signals containing the information necessary to configure said control device to control said electronic device.

9. A system as in Claim 8 wherein said electronic device sends said signals containing information necessary to configure said control device upon being connected to a power source.

35 10. A system as in Claim 8 wherein said electronic device and said control device communicate via infrared.

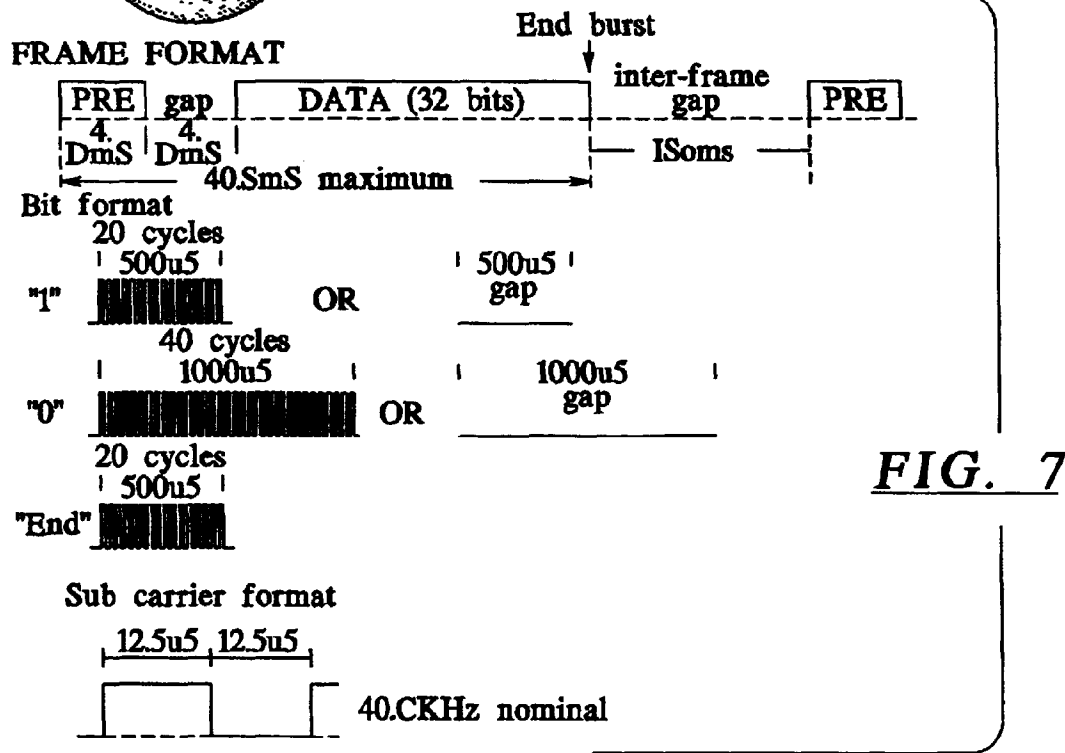
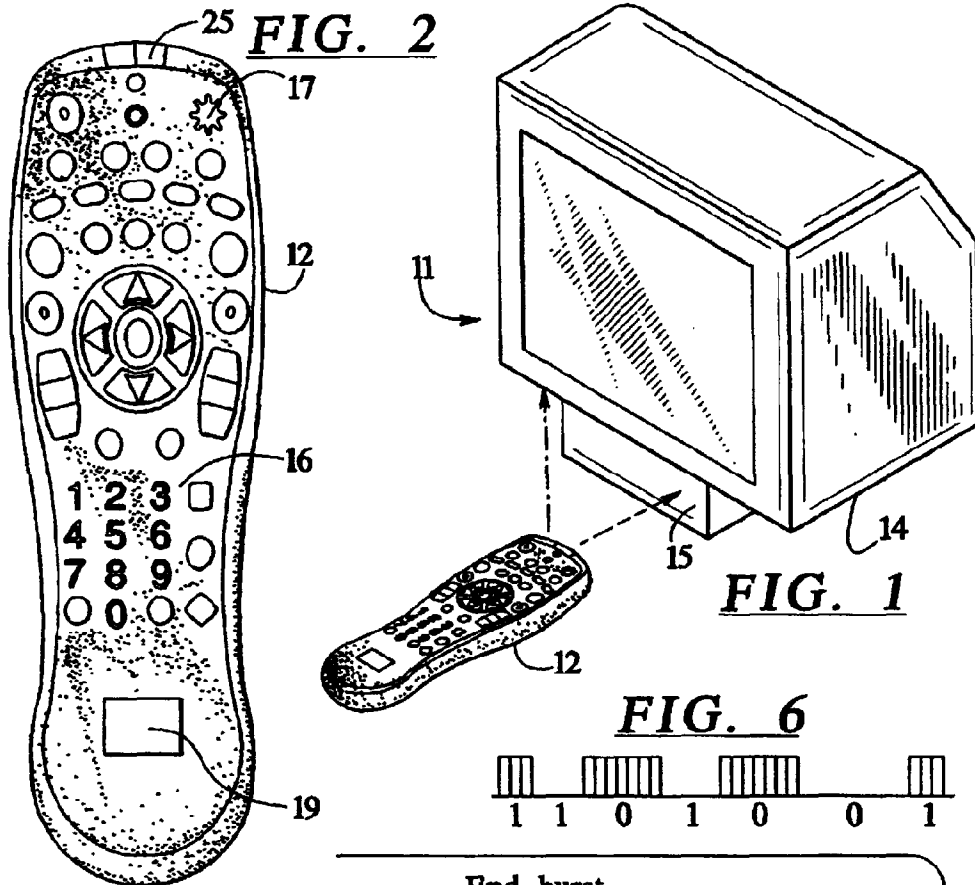
11. A system as in Claim 8 wherein said control device can be configured to control more than one electronic device.

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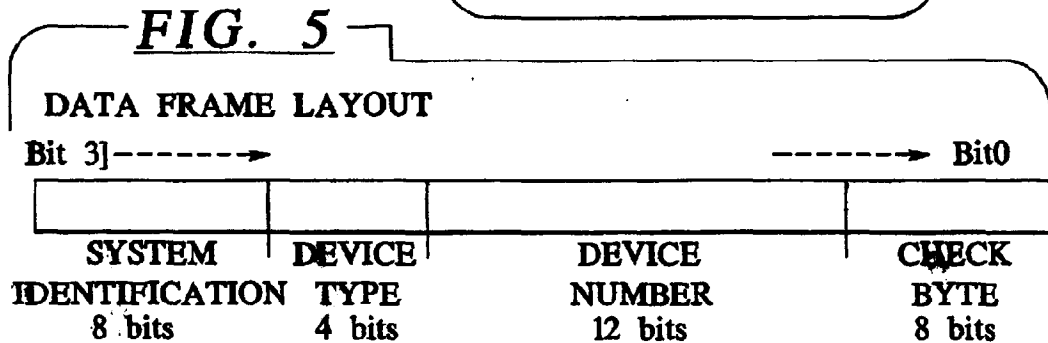
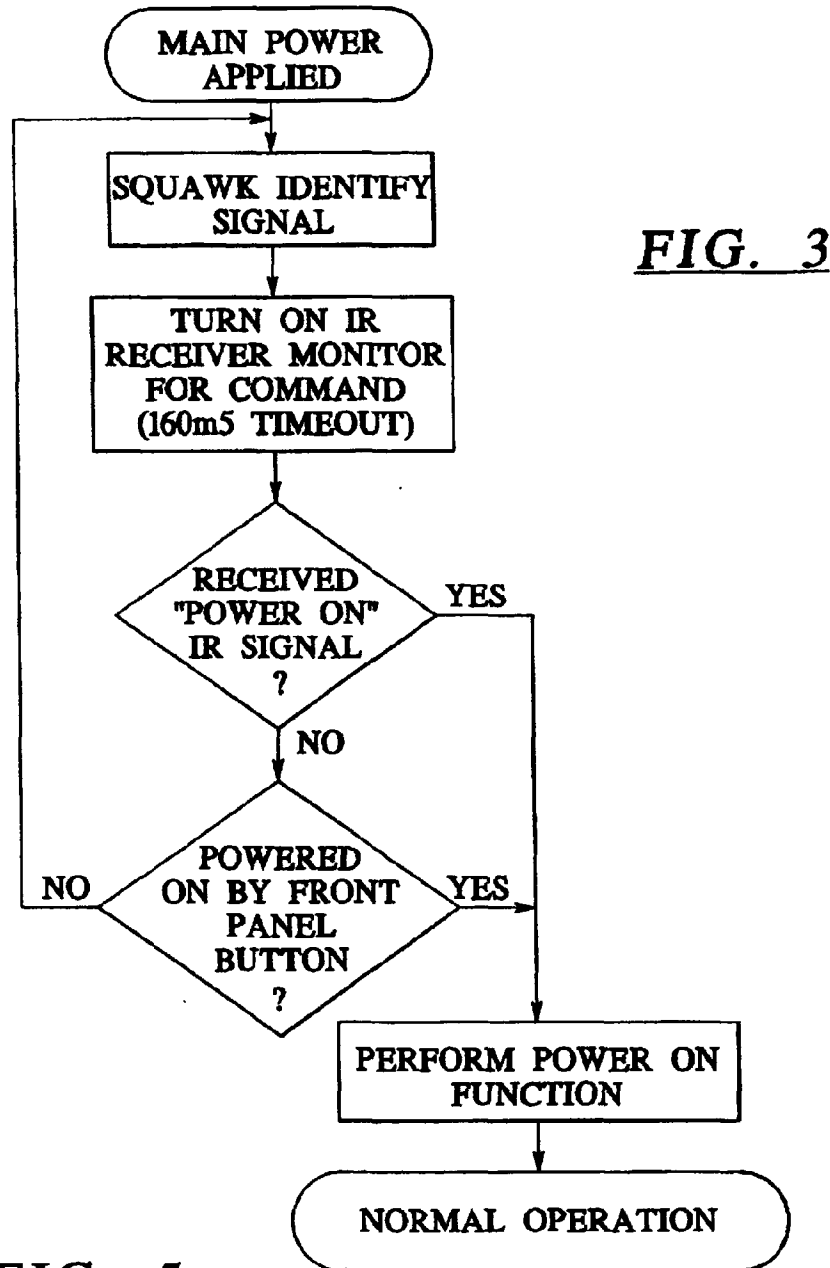
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INITIAL POWER APPLICATION PROCESS



SET-UP LOGIC

FIG. 4